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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 4706
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 0954
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 3387
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL CALCUTTA 0792
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 0794
RUDKIA/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 0475
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 2726
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0369
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC

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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
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STATE FOR EAP/MLS; PACOM FOR FPA

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SUBJECT: BURMA/TIP: MUTED REACTION TO THE 2006 TIP REPORT

REF: RANGOON 0772

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The GOB officially reacted to the 2006 Trafficking in Persons (TIP) Report through a critique in the state press June 20. Although it was given front-page attention, regime criticism of the Tier 3 ranking was restrained, reflecting the SPDC's expectation to retain Tier 3 rankings, its satisfaction over modest progress acknowledged in the Report, and a growing recognition that rampant, unaddressed incidents of forced labor underpin Burma's Tier 3 ranking. GOB efforts to address transnational trafficking are unaffected by the negative TIP Report ranking, but progress in addressing forced labor remains unrealized. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The GOB responded to the June 5 release of the TIP report via press release in a front-page article in the government's June 20 "New Light of Myanmar." The lead, promising development and a better future, is followed by a more specific sub-title stating that the GOB "will also continue to exert utmost endeavors to combat trafficking in persons." The release expresses regret over Burma's placement on the TIP Report's list of Tier 3 countries and rejects the economic sanctions that accompany Tier 3 as "unjust unilateral measures." As it did last year, the GOB claims the TIP Report's narrative on Burma is contradictory. The article quotes selectively from the report, highlighting mention of its modest, positive steps taken with regard to prosecution of traffickers, protection of trafficking victims, and prevention of new incidents of trafficking. The article concludes with the defiant exclamation that the SPDC will continue "to exert utmost endeavors" to fight trafficking in persons despite negative reports that "blindly refuse" to acknowledge its ongoing efforts to deal with the problem.

¶3. (SBU) In a June 20 meeting, Nikolas Win Myint, project advisor at the UN Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-region (UNIAP), noted that he has not yet received any direct reaction from key GOB anti-TIP interlocutors. He attributed this to the officials' move to Pyinmana and his view of their greater reluctance to meet with international organizations' expatriate staff. Drawing on past discussions with the government, Win Myint claimed

that GOB officials, such as Col. Sit Aye fully understand the USG's definition of TIP and its inclusion of forced labor and child soldiering as forms of trafficking. They also perceive a "political element" to the Report and do not expect Burma to be taken off of Tier 3 anytime soon.

¶4. (SBU) Win Myint opined that an official with anti-trafficking expertise wrote the GOB's measured critique.

Accepting a Tier 3 ranking as a given each year, officials working on TIP here may find solace in the Report's few citations that show some progress addressing transnational trafficking, he said. Win Myint recalled a statement made by a senior police official at a March 2006 national seminar in Rangoon; the official called on participants to ignore the perennial Tier 3 ranking and instead to work for improved anti-trafficking efforts motivated by self-determination.

¶5. (SBU) Comment: As usual, the only GOB response to the USG statement came through the media. The subdued tone of the reaction appears to reflect an acknowledgment that Burma will remain on Tier 3 as long as the widespread forced labor crimes remain unaddressed. Although some in the GOB appear sincere in their efforts to address cross border trafficking, they have no role to address forced labor crimes, committed largely by regime authorities and the military. The GOB's limited commitment to fight trafficking may be born not out of human rights concerns, but rather out of concern over the damage to "the pride and pedigree of Myanmar nationality that should be valued and safeguarded by Myanmar race (sic)," as stated in the preamble to the country's new anti-trafficking law.
STOLTZ